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SUBJECT: BRIAN COWEN ANNOUNCES CANDIDACY FOR LEADERSHIP OF FIANNA  
FAIL; VIRTUALLY CERTAIN TO BECOME IRELAND'S NEXT PRIME MINISTER

REF: (A) DUBLIN 170

(B) DUBLIN 166

11. (U) On Saturday, April 5, Brian Cowen, Irish Deputy Prime Minister (Tanaiste) and Minister of Finance formally submitted his nomination to the Chief Whip of the Fianna Fail parliamentary party for the position of leader of Fianna Fail, effective May 7 -- the date of the planned resignation of Bertie Ahern, the current party leader.

12. (U) In the past 48 hours, every Fianna Fail Member of Parliament who might have mounted a challenge to Cowen for party leadership has announced their support of him. Leadership of Fianna Fail, the dominant party in the Fianna Fail/Green Party/Progressive Democrat coalition, positions Cowen to become Irish Prime Minister on May 7 - assuming there is no change in the support of Fianna Fail's coalition partners.

13. (SBU) Comment: So far, there has been nary a whisper that the governing coalition might crack. If anything Fianna Fail's position is strengthening. John Gormley, the Green Party leader, stood staunchly behind Ahern when he announced his resignation on April 2. (The Green Party is the second largest coalition partner.) Progressive Democrat (PD) leader Mary Harney also voiced support for Cowen, but the support of the PDs - with only two members of Parliament - is becoming increasingly marginal. On April 4 Fianna Fail announced that independent Member of Parliament Beverley Flynn would be readmitted to the party, increasing Fianna Fail's numbers in the Parliament. It has become a foregone conclusion that Cowen will be elected party leader unopposed when the Fianna Fail parliamentary party meets on Wednesday, April 9. It is virtually certain that he will be Ireland's next Prime Minister.

FOLEY